

From: Christopher Gebhardt
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 11/26/01 9:55pm
Subject: Comments on the Microsoft settlement

To whom it may concern,

As a student of computer engineering who has followed the progress of the Microsoft anti-trust case from the beginning, I would like to voice my disappointment with a couple aspects of the proposed settlement.

Although I believe that Microsoft's unethical business tactics should be punished monetarily and with regulations on OEM pricing and licensing, these are not solutions to the root of Microsoft's monopolist power. The real issue is a more technical one.

Microsoft's ability to twist the arm of the market into buying its software comes primarily from its proprietary file formats--most prominently, those used by Microsoft Office. The MS Office file formats, such as for word processing (.doc) or spreadsheets (.xls), are merely a "map" for storing the data generated by their respective programs. Proprietary file formats do not give Microsoft products any technological advantage in the software market. Instead, they are merely a means to keep competing software from being able to properly load and modify documents created by Microsoft Office.

As a result of proprietary file formats used in Microsoft programs, customers who already use MS Office (or who must communicate documents with people who do) are unable to switch to competing products. Most of this competing software is just as capable, if not superior, to Microsoft's own, but is unusable to many people simply because it cannot properly import data from Microsoft's programs. Because Microsoft has kept its file format "roadmaps" secret, competitors and free software projects are unable to provide the compatibility necessary to win customers.

I believe that the solution to this issue is very clear and should be added to the anti-trust settlement. I propose that Microsoft be forced to publish, on its public web site, the full specifications and details of all current, previous, and future file formats used by Microsoft Office software. This remedy need not include any Microsoft source code, rather only plain-English technical

documentation. Such information would allow competitors to extend their software to be fully compatible with Microsoft Office file formats--although this information should also be made freely available to the public so that charitable free software projects may benefit from MS Office compatibility.

Please thoughtfully consider what I have proposed and feel free to respond via e-mail with any questions or comments.

Thank you. And may God bless America!

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